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FOLK-CUSTOM AND FOLK-BELIEF IN NORTH CAROLINA.

THIS part of North Carolina was settled by Germans, and the superstitions, habits, and occupations are very quaint, for, either from filial piety or a kind of laziness, these people are surely the most conservative on earth. Whether this quality is a result of their virtues or their vices, it serves to make them almost as interesting here as Mr. Julian Hawthorne has made them in his "Saxon Studies." First I began a collection of "signs," thinking them all superstitions, but I find that those relating to agricultural life are not so. The heavens were made before almanacs, and these people plant by the signs of the Zodiac, as their ancestors probably did a thousand years ago.

SIGNS.

Every seed has a certain sign in which it must be planted. Besides the signs, of course the moon is an all-powerful potentate. She seems to rule everything.

All vegetables which grow under the ground — turnips, radishes, etc. — must be planted in the "dark of the moon," and all on top in the "light of it." That is general, and universally observed.

Good Friday is a chosen day for planting everything, but especially beans.

All Fridays are good days for planting things that hang down, like beans or grapes, *i. e.* stringy things, because Friday is "hangman's day."

Plant corn always when the "little moon" (new moon) points down; the ears grow low on the stalks, and make heavy ears. Also put the roof on a building when the little moon hangs down, so the shingles won't turn up.

Sow wheat before the full moon in October.

If hickory leaves turn a pretty yellow in the autumn, the next harvest will be a good, rich, golden one.

Of course signs can be multiplied innumeraibly, so I have confined myself to a few about the few oldest things, — death, birth, marriage, moving. I find moving to be full of horrors apparently, and more incruited in signs than anything else except death.

Move in the increase of the moon, and always carry something into the house first that the wind won't blow away.

It is lucky to move salt first.

Never move a broom or a cat.

Never marry when the sign is in the crawfish; you'll go backwards.

Never marry in May.
 Happy the bride the sun shines on,
 and
 Something old and something new,
 Something borrowed, something blue,

are two rhymes about marriage.

If two spoons are in the same cup of coffee or tea as it is handed, it is a sign of marriage.

There is a belief that fortunes can be told by coffee grounds, or rather a husband's coming can be foretold.

If, on rising from a chair, it falls over, the person causing the accident will not marry for twelve months.

The breast-bone or wish-bone of a chicken, if pulled apart by two people, marriage will come first to the one having the shortest piece. If put over the door, the person who first comes under will be the bride or bridegroom elect.

THE DEAD.

In burying or laying out the dead, the feet must always be to the east, the head to the west. Meg Merrilies herself could not enforce this more rigidly.

There is a custom prevailing among some of putting a piece of muslin over the face of the dead; and when the coffin is carried to the church, and coffin opened for friends to see (in the country, where people live miles apart, and travel must be over terrible roads, this is the only way for friends to take a farewell of those gone before), the muslin is removed and laid over the hands: it is bad luck if any one should put the muslin back over the face. In fact, *that would not be permitted under any circumstances*. I have not been able to form any conjecture as to why this should be so guardedly, almost fiercely, observed.

In other places, sheets and white spreads are put over everything in the room, even over the pictures, so that the entire room where the dead lies shall be white. It is sometimes beautiful.

To put up an umbrella in the house is a sign of death, sometimes of just bad luck, but it is a deep-seated belief that it is disastrous.

A bird coming in the house is a sure sign of death; even flying through it is the same.

In making garments for the dead, never bite the thread; it will make the teeth rot.

A screech-owl screeching near the house is a sure sign of death's approach.

If two people look in a mirror at once, the younger will die within a year.

Three lights in a room, or thirteen at table, is death to some one of the party present.

If two people work with another's head at the same time, the person will die soon.

A dog's howl means the approach of death.

One death brings on another. There are always two together.

Rain falling on a new-made grave is a good sign.

To turn to more frivolous signs from these very grave ones, they are legion indeed. These that I have selected are not negro superstitions. I have tried to leave out all of these.

Bad luck it is to hear a hen crow; kill it immediately.

When you hear the first whippoorwill in the spring, turn a summersault three times and you'll never have backache.

The cows are bewitched when butter won't come: pour the cream behind the backlog and it will run off the witches. (A common practice.)

Wean a calf when the sign is in the feet; the calf will not take it so to heart and bawl.

A chunk on fire, falling down on the hearth, is a sure sign that a guest is coming.

So, also, if the scissors fall and stick up in the floor.

Never thank anybody who gives you seed; if you do, they will never do any good.

Get out of bed and turn your shoes over if you cannot sleep; it will drive off the witches that are keeping you awake.

A rabbit running across the road in front of you is dreadful luck.

THEY-SAYS ABOUT BABIES.

Must not cut baby's nails with scissors before 't is a year old: 't will make it steal.

Must not hand a baby out of a window, or it will be hanged.

The first time a baby is taken out of its room or its natal room, it must be taken up, or it will not go to heaven. If the door of the room steps down, as so many of these patched-up houses do, then the person carrying the baby must step up on a chair or book with baby in her arms.

A SOWER'S CHARM.

Many old people are looked upon as so successful as sowers that they are believed to be possessed of some charm. One kind of incantation, sung as each handful of seed is thrown, I have found; it is used by an old man who has been champion turnip-seed sower for fifty years or more:—

Some for de bug,
 Some for de fly,
 Some for de devil,
 And in comes I.

I cannot find any others, though there are more.

DOGGEREL.

Whenever one of the red and black spotted bugs is seen, you must say :—

Lady bug, lady bug, fly away home,
 Your house is on fire and your children will burn.

Ask me no questions, I 'll tell you no lies.

PITHY SAYINGS.

Not every horn that blows, blows for dinner.
 The hands are called in from the field for the noon meal by a horn, on the plantations and farms.

“I'd call my hounds off that track,” is another old saying.

Sense enough to come in out of the rain.

Bred in the bone.

It's a bad bird that fouls its own nest.

Joy go with you ; you 'll leave peace behind you.

Tit for tat,
 You kill my dog, I 'll kill your cat.

“You 'll find the latchstring on the outside,” and “We 'll put on the big pot and the little one,” are forms of welcome or friendly invitation.

“Pot luck ” is used here, and “Pot calling kettle black ” is an old saying.

The sight of you is good for sore eyes.

Scarce as hen's teeth.

BREAD-MAKING.

In some parts of this country, people still use the Dutch ovens for baking, exactly as they did a hundred years ago. A Dutch oven is a large brick structure, shaped like an egg cut half in two, with a chimney. It stands in the yard, separate from everything, as it is large enough for an independent building. In order to bake, the furnace under it is fired until the bricks are heated white, then the fire is all scraped out and the door closed, or rather the bread is put in and the doors closed. When the bricks are cool the bread is cooked, is “done,” as it is called. The process of bread-making is primitive. It is put to rise in baskets made of broom-sage. These baskets are wrapped in a blanket kept for their exclusive use, and then *put in the bed to rise*,— under the cover, just as a human being

is. Why this place should be chosen I cannot conceive, but it has been so from the beginning, whenever that was. After it has risen it is made into loaves; each loaf is placed on a cabbage leaf; both are put on a thin board made for the purpose, to which a very long handle is attached. The loaf is shoved back in the oven this way, tilted off on the floor, and the stick and board drawn out.

When the loaf is taken out, although it is cooked through and through and the cabbage leaf is printed distinctly on the bottom, the leaf itself is only browned, and has imparted no flavor to the loaf whatever.

This is a great country for home coloring, and during the war the knowledge of woods was useful. I give some of them:—

Pine bark and copperas color purple.

Oak bark (black and red oak), purple.

Sumach and copperas, black.

Chestnut, oak, and copperas, brown.

Hickory and alum, green.

Always color in the dark of the moon for dark colors, and *vice versa*.

REMEDIES.

Amber beads worn around the neck cure weak eyes.

A potato carried in the pocket constantly will cure rheumatism by absorption. It all goes into the potato, and it becomes hard and knotty.

A buckeye carried in the pocket brings and keeps good luck.

Barberry-root tea is a favorite remedy, or trusted one rather, everywhere.

Onion poultices lull to sleep, it is believed.

The inside lining of chicken livers, dried and prepared in a certain way, are sure cure for dyspepsia.

GAMES OF CHILDREN.

I have been much interested in Mr. Culin's article on "Street Games of Boys in Brooklyn" (vol. iv. 1891, p. 221), and find that many of the games described by him are time-honored in western North Carolina.

"Shinney" is played here, as in Brooklyn.

"Hop-skotch" is also played, with some differences, but is pronounced "hopskot."

"Cat" is much the same, and it is a delicious thought that in this game we find the touch of nature which makes the whole world—even the prehistoric world—kin.

"I spy" is more commonly played under the name of "Hunk Over-Dee." I had supposed this a collection of arbitrary sounds, until Mr. Culin's article gave ground for the belief that the name comes from a Scotch playground. "Over the Dee" was probably the *Ultima Thule* of a home, or hunk, to these Scotch children.

The settlers of this neighborhood were almost exclusively Germans, and those who did not come direct from Germany drifted from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

In former times, the games were always sung. Examples are:—

Old sister Phoebe, how merry were we.
 Old sweet peas and barley grows.
 The cherry-tree.
 Queen Anne she sits in the sun.
 King George and his army.

The following contains a memory of the Revolutionary War:—

QUEBEC TOWN.

We are marching down to Quebec town,
 Where the drums and fifes are beating;
 The Americans have gained the day,
 And the British are retreating.
 The war 's all over; we 'll turn back
 To friends, no more to be parted.
 We 'll open our ring and receive another in
 To relieve this broken-hearted.

The manner of playing was as follows: The song was sung by the whole company, as it marched around one person, who was blindfolded, and seated in a chair placed in the centre of the room. He or she then selected a partner by touching one of the ring with a long stick held for the purpose. The game concluded:—

Put a hat on her head to keep her head warm,
 And a loving, sweet kiss will do her no harm.¹

¹ In *Games and Songs of American Children* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1883) a version of this game is printed as follows:—

We were marching to Quebec,
 The drums were loudly beating;
 America has gained the day,
 The British are retreating.
 The war is o'er, and they are turned back,
 Forevermore departed;
 So open the ring, and take one in,
 For they are broken-hearted.
 Oh, you 're the one that I love best,
 I praise you high and dearly;
 My heart you 'll get, my hand I 'll give,
 The kiss is most sincerely.

This version is from Massachusetts. The North Carolina form seems more

CHICK-UR-MUR CRAVY CROW.

A game universally popular. One of the players squats on the ground, and makes movements as if searching for something. The remainder stand in a chain, each clasping with arms the waist of the one in front. The game opens with marching around the "Old Witch," as the stooping figure is called, singing or chanting:—

"Chick-ur-mur, chick-ur-mur, cravy crow,
Went to the well to wash my toe,
When I came back my chicken was gone:
What time is it, Old Witch?"
"One."

The chant now begins again, and continues until the witch calls the witching hour of twelve.

Then the "old hen," as the head of the column is called, demands,—

"What are you looking for, Old Witch?"
"Grandmother's darning-needle."
"When did she lose it?"
"Last deep snow."
"Is this it?"

showing first one foot and then another, down the whole line, until the last. To all the witch says "No" until the last, when she starts in pursuit. Of course, when the old hen turns, the whole column must turn, and she fences the witch in defence of the chicks behind her. The first one caught has to be Witch in his or her turn.

For rainy days, William-Cum Trimbletoe held undisputed sway, but here he is called

Williamty Trimmety,
He's a good fisherman,—
Ketches hens,
Puts 'em in pens;
Some lays eggs and some lays none.
Wire, briar, limber lock,
Set and sing till twelve o'clock.
Clock fell down,
Mouse ran round.
O U T spells
Out, and begone!

original, and the method of play perhaps indicates how the rhyme was originally employed. The seated player is supposed to mourn the absence of a lover at the wars, and therefore to be broken-hearted. The use of the term "American" is noticeable; in colonial use the word is always applied to the aborigines, the colonists being designated as English. I do not know that any one has investigated the introduction and use of the name in its present sense.

It is to be remarked that all the old games played in North Carolina seem to be of English origin; a circumstance which shows how little descent has to do with this stock.—*Ed. Journal of American Folk-Lore.*

POISON.

A stick is driven in the ground and the children catch hands and form a ring ; then they scramble and pull, in order to make one touch the stick, which is the poison, and the one who does touch it is poisoned : he or she then tries to poison all the others by touching them. By stooping down and placing the hands on the ground, one is vaccinated, as it were, and the poison will not take.

MARLEY BRIGHT.

As far as I can bore into the past, this is the oldest of games.

A group of children are placed at opposite bases. A little off the line of the bases, one or two are hidden for witches. One group calls to the other, —

“How many miles to Marley Bright ?”

Ans. “Threescore and ten.”

“Can I get there by candlelight ?”

Ans. “Yes, if your legs are long and light.”

(Or, “If legs are long and heels are light.”)

“But look out for the witch on the road.”

Then they set out for each other’s bases. The witch nearly always captures one, who helps her in her witchcraft until all are in her “den.” There are varieties of this game, but all have the same root.

This game, as well as the preceding, I find to have been played fifty years ago in precisely the same manner as to-day.

In this distinctly German settlement, the only nursery song with any mark of age is, —

When good King Arthur ruled this land,
When good King Arthur ruled this land,
He was a goodly king.

He stole three pecks of barley meal,
He stole three pecks of barley meal,
To make a plum pudding.

COUNTING-OUT RHYMES.

Henery, Menery, Deepery Dick,
Delia, Dollia, Dommernick,
Archer, Parcher, Domi Narcher,
High, Pon, Tus.

Another contained a strong old English word, which was abandoned as unfit for ears polite. It began : —

Ickery, ackery, ary, an,
Mulberry Tass and Tary Tam.

N. C. Hoke.